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ABSTRACT

Offering guidance on diagnostic and developmental techniques illustrated by examples from the classroom, this teacher's guide helps teachers to assess pupils' understanding and day-to-day progress in reading and to identify appropriate next steps to help pupils make progress. Topics explored in the teacher's guide include pupils' attitude and motivation to read, their ability to decode and pursue meaning, and their awareness of an author's use of language. The six examples in the teacher's guide illustrate the range of ways teachers can incorporate a structured diagnostic approach into their classroom teaching. (RS)

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TAKING *a closer look* at READING

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The Scottish Council for Research in Education

Education 5–14

English Language

Diagnostic Procedures

Taking a Closer Look at Reading

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Introductory booklet.

- *Key Ideas in Diagnostic Assessment: An Introduction to the Taking a Closer Look Series.* Revised edition (1995).

English Language. A package containing –

- *Taking a Closer Look at Reading* (1995). Teacher's guide.
- *Taking a Closer Look at Writing* (1995). Teacher's guide.
- The introductory booklet *Key Ideas.*

Mathematics.

Set 1: A package containing –

- *Taking a Closer Look at Shape, Position and Movement/Problem Solving: Space, Fact and Fiction* (1993). Pupil worksheets and teacher's notes and teacher's guide.
- The introductory booklet *Key Ideas.*

Set 2: A package containing –

- *Taking a Closer Look at Shape, Position and Movement/Problem Solving: Around Town* (1993). Pupil worksheets and teacher's notes.

Set 3: A package containing –

- *Taking a Closer Look at Number* (1995). Teacher's guide.
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- The introductory booklet *Key Ideas.*

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- *Taking a Closer Look at Science* (1995). Teacher's guide.
- The introductory booklet *Key Ideas.*

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The project was directed by Harry Black, depute director of SCRE. Harry's thoughtful leadership and stimulating criticism contributed immeasurably to the project. His sudden death in June 1994 shocked us all. He will be greatly missed.

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1 Introduction

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK AT READING

This is one of two resources which will help teachers with the day-to-day assessment of English language within the context of English Language 5-14. An accompanying guide on *Writing* forms part of the package of materials.

The guides are intended to follow on from the short booklet *Key Ideas in Diagnostic Assessment* (also in the pack). This booklet explains the general principles of using assessment to help learning and outlines the range of materials and approaches used in the diagnostic procedures series.

These publications are intended to assist schools in the development of 5-14 assessment policies and procedures and to help individual classroom teachers with the assessment of learning in a way which fits in with their normal teaching.

THE CLASSROOM CONTEXT

The material presented draws heavily upon a wide range of existing research and practice, much of which will already be familiar to teachers, and applies it in the context of Education 5-14. It aims to clarify and illustrate what is meant by a 'diagnostic procedure' and to help teachers to explore pupils' thinking as they work, and thus to guide learning more effectively.

In developing the materials, the project team worked alongside teachers in schools throughout the country to map out what 'taking a closer look' might mean in classrooms where the 5-14 curriculum is being implemented. In doing this, every attempt was made to think of assessment as a broad-based procedure integral with teaching and learning.

Most of the suggestions in this guide are applicable both in primary and secondary school contexts. However, the differences in organisation of primary and secondary classes mean that teachers will sometimes have to interpret the materials to suit their own situations. Class size is an obvious case in point. The organisation of the school day is a further factor — the length of the average class period in secondary schools will influence what can be done and careful planning will be required to ensure that individual attention can be given to all pupils over time.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide looks at various aspects of pupils' reading development: pupils' understanding of the purposes for which a text may be read; the pursuit of meaning within a text; and awareness of the ways in which authors may use language.

Chapter 2 (Taking a closer look at learning to read) looks at the teaching and assessment of reading from the point of view of the purpose for which that reading is undertaken.

Chapter 3 (Diagnostic procedures in reading) considers what is involved in taking a closer look at pupils' reading.

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Chapter 4 (Promoting success in reading) suggests ways in which diagnostic procedures may be put into practice.

Chapter 5 (Areas for exploration) presents strategies which teachers can use to promote successful reading.

Chapter 6 (Examples of diagnostic procedures in practice) provides examples of the use of diagnostic procedures by teachers in a variety of aspects of classroom teaching.

Reference is made in the text to the following publications relating to the Education 5–14 programme:

Scottish Office Education Department (1991) *Assessment 5–14: Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland, National Guidelines*. Scottish Office Education Department.

Scottish Office Education Department (1991) *English Language 5–14: Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland, National Guidelines*. Scottish Office Education Department.

2 Taking a closer look at learning to read

THE TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT OF READING

Diagnostic assessment is an aspect of assessment as part of teaching. Its aim is to take a closer look at pupils' learning – to see how they are dealing with what they are doing, and to examine their strengths and needs in relation to particular tasks or learning targets. It explores pupils' thinking and reactions in order to enable the teacher to tailor teaching to pupils' individual needs.

Assessment 5–14 sets out four interrelated factors which affect learning:

What is to be learned?

- Teaching and learning aims should be clear and shared.

Are the pupils motivated to learn?

- Pupils are most likely to be successful when they are confident and enthusiastic about the task.

Are the pupils ready to learn?

- Effective learning should build on previous experience and take account of present abilities and specific needs.

Are learning and teaching effective?

- Tasks, activities and methods of learning and teaching should be designed thoughtfully, with clear purpose.

What does this mean in relation to reading?

Clear learning and teaching aims

The question 'what is to be learned?' does not refer only to the teacher's learning aims for the pupils. The learners can be involved in specifying their own aims and criteria when reading a text. Pupils can be asked to consider questions like:

- what makes you want to listen to someone reading aloud?
- what does 'good reading' sound like?
- what do you hope to get from reading this book?

Motivation

The quality of learning will depend upon how pupils view themselves as learners. Do they see themselves as successful learners who can approach tasks with confidence or have they learned not to expect success?

English Language 5–14, in the 'Programmes of Study' section, describes desirable features of the teaching of reading. Above all, it is important to help pupils to realise from the beginning that reading is a purposeful activity involving a search for meaning. It also calls on previous experience of life and of reading, and uses clues from the context and specific purpose of the activity, as well as from the text itself, to help 'make the meaning'. The growth of motivation to read, of a desire to know 'what it's about' or 'what happens next' or 'how to find out' is crucial. Good conditions for effective teaching of reading skills include the provision of a wide selection of colourful, interesting fiction and non-fiction and active encouragement of reading for enjoyment.

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Previous experience and present abilities

Most children already have extensive experience of spoken language and many have a relatively wide awareness of print before they come to school. Effective teaching of reading builds on pre-existing language awareness and helps pupils develop an initial sight vocabulary and skills of 'word attack'.

Individual reading should be complemented by paired reading. Links between home and school where reading is a shared activity are also extremely valuable in helping to establish the importance of reading.

As the pupils get older and begin to read more complex texts, teaching will help to develop an understanding of genre. Exposure to a wide range of texts can serve to make pupils aware of how different texts are structured, and to develop their sense of style.

Effective tasks and flexible teaching methods

Diagnostic assessment in reading will be concerned mainly with finding out how pupils are interpreting and carrying out a wide variety of reading tasks. Some evidence will be found in written responses but more will come from observing and discussing with the pupils. Discussion will encourage them to reflect on their own work and think about how progress might best be made.

It is not possible to isolate the pupils' reading of particular texts or types of text from their wider understanding of the world, from the teaching they have received or from their previous experiences. It may nevertheless be helpful for both teachers and pupils to consider separately general reading skills and the pupil's particular approach to specific types of reading task, even though they are inextricably linked.

Traditional analyses of reading into sets of apparently distinct sub-skills give a false impression that these can be separately assessed and taught. It is not useful to separate 'lower order' skills (for example, 'literal comprehension') and 'higher order' ones (for example, 'inferences'). In any piece of reading, at any level of difficulty or sophistication, pupils might be employing any or all of the 'sub-skills', recognising literal meaning of what is written and making inferences by relating it to their own experience.

There has been general agreement among researchers and teachers for a long time that language development, whether 'receptive', (reading and listening) or 'productive' (writing and talking), benefits from using and thinking about language in purposeful activity.

A PURPOSES APPROACH TO READING

It is important that pupils play a role in determining what to read and for what purposes.

Pupils do, however, sometimes need guidance from the teacher as to what to look for in a particular text. They may be encouraged, for example, to read for information, or to compare and contrast different narrative perspectives. The following are examples of a task devised with reading purpose in mind.

Example A: Sir Mark the Valiant

The pupils would already have had the chance to read the whole of this short story about a little boy's vivid dream adventure. They could then be asked to read the following passage (which is the opening of the story) looking for certain things:

- *how we can tell that Mark thought the castle was wonderful and almost real.* (Pupils might highlight or underline all the information about this and discuss any differences of view.)
- *what we find out about Mark's whooping cough and how it made him feel.* (Again pupils might highlight this information, using a different colour or underline with a broken line; and discuss.)
- *the moment when the castle suddenly seemed different.* (Pupils might put a box round the sentence or two sentences.)
- *all the words in the last paragraph which tell us about the way Sir Guy and his horse moved.* (Pupils might highlight, or list; and discuss any differing views.)

Sir Mark the Valiant

There was once a little boy called Mark who had to stay in bed because he had whooping cough. His friends couldn't visit him in case they too caught the whooping cough, but he didn't really mind, as he had something very special to play with.

That something special was a castle which stood on a little table by Mark's bed. It had a tower and ramparts and a moat with a drawbridge over it, and it was made to look as if it had been built long, long ago. Actually, it was made in a modern factory, and Mark's father had bought it cheaply in a sale. But Mark hated to hear his mother tell people it was cheap; he thought it was so grand and beautiful, it ought to have cost lots and lots of money.

Mark also had a flag which he put on the tower and a handsome knight, dressed in white armour and riding on a white horse with a long mane and tail. The knight he called Sir Guy and he put him on the ramparts to keep a watch for enemies. The horse had its head turned a little, as if it was looking for enemies to come and attack the castle from behind.

There were many windows in the castle; in the tower, which had a winding staircase, there were narrow slits and in the top of the tower there was just one window with bars.

'That is where Sir Guy puts his prisoners,' Mark told his mother.

The little boy played with the castle all day long, and at night when his mother put it back on the table, he would lie gazing at it till he fell asleep. Sometimes the coughing would be so bad that it made his eyes water so that he saw everything through a haze; then the castle seemed to be shimmering with lights from every window – except one; the barred window in the tower was always dark.

'Sir Guy will put the light on when he puts his prisoner there,' said Mark.

One night he had been coughing and whooping so much that both his father and mother had sat with him, one holding his poor head and the other his hand. At last it stopped and he could breathe more comfortably. So his mother gave him some medicine and his father tucked him up, and then they both said goodnight and put out the light.

Mark was very tired; he lay there rubbing his eyes and then he looked at the castle. It looked so beautiful with the lights shimmering in every window – every window? Mark sat up in bed; even the barred window in the tower was lit up tonight! And what was that? Surely Sir Guy was moving? Yes, his head was moving from side to side, and now he was lifting his hand to shade his eyes, as if he was searching for something in the distance. Now the horse moved its head too and pawed the ground with its right foreleg!

Suddenly Sir Guy dug his spurs in, galloped over the drawbridge and headed his horse straight up the counterpane towards Mark's chest! It looked as if he were riding through a flowery meadow and the horse's mane and tail were flying in the wind!

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Example B: The Lonely Scarecrow

Pupils might be asked to work out:

- *what the scarecrow looks like, what is his appearance?*
- *what he feels about himself*
- *whether his feelings are at all like the way some people feel.*

The Lonely Scarecrow

My poor old bones – I've only two.
A broomstick and a broken stave.
My ragged gloves are a disgrace.
My one peg-foot is in the grave.
I wear the labourer's old clothes:
Coat, shirt, and trousers all undone.
I bear my cross upon a hill.
In rain and shine, in snow and sun.
I cannot help the way I look.
My funny hat is full of hay.
– O, wild birds, come and nest in me.
Why do you always fly-away?

James Kirkup

The teacher might read the poem aloud, perhaps twice, and ensure that the pupils understood any difficult words (for example labourer, stave). Pupils might then be asked to read the poem carefully and to discuss the questions given above.

Among the more specific questions the teacher might ask (in writing or orally) in order to assist pupils' thinking might be:

- what is the scarecrow made of? – try to find all the things mentioned.
- which words or phrases in particular, in each verse, tell us something about what the scarecrow thinks or feels about himself?
- [For some pupils] why do you think James Kirkup wrote 'I bear my cross upon a hill'? what does this mean? does it remind you of anything or anyone?
- what does he want the birds to do? why? why do they not do it?
- the scarecrow and how he feels could remind us of what happens to some people. Can you think of anyone who might feel like the scarecrow and say 'I cannot help the way I look'?
- what does the poem make us feel about the scarecrow and about other people?

3 Diagnostic procedures in reading

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Learning to read, like learning to do anything else, is a complex process. As children differ greatly in their approach to learning to read, it is not possible to propose a set of specific diagnostic procedures which would always be applied in the same way and in the same order. Deciding how to gather evidence on pupils' progress, appraising the evidence and exploring with the pupils how best to move forward inevitably involves professional judgement by the teacher. It is important to use diagnostic procedures to help pupils themselves to become more clearly aware of what they have been trying to achieve. Teachers can also introduce them to strategies which they can use to help them deal with the requirements of different reading tasks.

The teacher's professional judgement is also important in deciding when to support the pupil's reading (the introductory booklet to the series offers more detailed information on this). Pupils are likely to benefit from the teacher's guidance before embarking on particular tasks. Intervention through questioning and group discussion may be valuable during reading, to ensure attention to important aspects of the text and to find out how pupils are constructing the meaning of the text. It is also possible to use pupils' responses to a particular text to explore further their thinking on a topic.

OBTAINING EVIDENCE

Evidence of what is happening during reading may be obtained in a number of different ways, from the day-to-day activities of observing and questioning pupils, and from special tasks, including tests. These will enable the teacher to see whether pupils have clear ideas of what they want from the text and whether the task is pitched at the right level for the pupil's ability.

While most information, or evidence, will come from day-to-day activities, it is likely that teachers will design special tasks for specific purposes. Teachers may wish to find out pupils' ideas about a topic before they undertake a task, and at the end of a topic they will want to try to identify what has been learned. In addition teachers may use tasks or tests designed by others. For example when they believe that a pupil has moved from one level to another they will use items from the bank of national test items to confirm their professional judgement; or they may choose to build into their existing teaching programmes a commercially designed task to help identify appropriate next steps for pupils.

FOCUSING ON GROWTH POINTS AND ACTING ON EVIDENCE

In any particular reading task, diagnostic observation, questioning and discussion should be focused on a small number of aspects of reading which the pupil can develop or improve. Diagnostic assessment is principally concerned with identifying and working from the pupil's own thinking. The focus should be on areas which both teacher and pupil regard as important, and the aim should be to develop skills which the pupil already possesses to some extent.

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One effective way of focusing on something the pupil can deal with is to observe and discuss with three questions in mind:

- what is being done successfully?
  - from the pupil's perspective
  - from the teacher's perspective.
- what is being attempted, perhaps without full success?
- what skills does the pupil lack?

In addition, groups of pupils working together supportively with clearly defined criteria for success can also offer helpful insights into 'next steps' for themselves and others.

A crucial element in diagnostic assessment is working with pupils to enable them to move on. This involves the identification of the most helpful next steps and strategies either in continuing work on the current task or in setting the next task. Some suggestions for various types of possible action are given in Chapter 4.

The final chapter provides examples of teachers supporting pupils' learning by identifying areas for exploration and suggesting possible next steps.

Most diagnostic assessment, and the related teaching, occurs on an ad hoc basis in the course of ordinary classroom activity. From time to time it is useful to use the individual 5–14 assessment record. This enables the pupil, the teacher, and the pupil's next teacher, to make use of the diagnostic assessment in a range of different ways in future activities, in planning blocks of teaching and in discussion with parents.

4 Promoting success in reading: using the procedures in practice

Teachers use their professional judgement in the application of diagnostic procedures. Their approach may vary according to the individual pupil, the particular task and the particular circumstances. Individual pupils can be helped to read more effectively if the teacher working with the pupil focuses attention on the pupil's ways of dealing with reading tasks, builds on successes and finds ways round difficulties. It is suggested, however, that there are three key stages in any diagnostic teaching, three procedures which characterise the diagnostic teacher:

- areas for exploration are identified
- questions related to each area are considered
- next steps for the pupil to take are identified and both teacher and pupil have a clear idea of what these are and of how to approach them.

This section, based on research into reading and studies of best practice, suggests strategies which teachers can use to encourage effective reading.

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION

English Language 5–14 identified 6 'strands' of reading based on purposes for reading: reading for information; reading for enjoyment; reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft; awareness of genre or type of text; reading aloud; and knowledge about language.

In any reading task, whatever its purpose, pupils seek meaning; they try to make sense of what is on the page in terms of their own experience and use this and the context of the particular text to make predictions about the continuation of a sentence, chapter, theme or plot. This process of predicting and searching for a meaning can be the means of achieving fluency. But it can also sometimes impede understanding of what is written, because readers, influenced by previous knowledge, can make wrong guesses about what the text is actually communicating. It may be helpful to consider four 'areas for exploration' to be considered in helping pupils to search for meaning effectively:

- attitude and motivation – to reading in general and to the particular task being undertaken
- decoding – how the pupils recognise words and sentences
- pursuit of meaning – how the pupils learn to use prior experience and all the context cues in the text to construct their own perception of what is being communicated
- awareness of the author's use of language – how the pupils learn about the choice of words, images and their structures to convey meaning, suggest ideas, and achieve effects.

Though these four aspects of reading are in practice interrelated, it is useful to think of them separately for the purposes of analysing pupils' work, recognising their strengths and identifying appropriate next steps.

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All four areas for exploration will be relevant in any kind of reading task. For each there is a continuum of complexity, unfamiliarity, and difficulty as the texts become more advanced. Expectations of beginning and less advanced readers should be appropriate for their actual stage of progress. Reading for certain purposes may entail 'sub-areas', for example reading for information involves using various information-finding skills. Often the emphasis might be on improving reading in respect of just one or two aspects of one or two of these areas, identifying 'growth points' which the pupil can develop.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Within each area for exploration a number of possible 'questions to consider' have been identified. The lists on the pages which follow are examples of the types of question which teachers might ask to help them obtain quality information about the pupils' thinking. Finding out what the pupils think and what they consider important is crucial if appropriate next steps are to be identified. It is also extremely useful to work with the pupil to identify questions which could be used.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Linked to the questions to consider are suggestions for helping children to improve their reading. These are suggestions which teachers, or teachers and pupils in partnership, may wish to consider as they decide on an appropriate course of action. In the identification of good 'next steps', it is important to recognise the pupil as a valuable source of evidence! Which next steps does the learner think are likely to be most effective? Discussion with the pupil is crucial.

The suggestions must be set in the context of each particular pupil's reading development and related to the pupil's other learning experiences. What does the child think will help him or her to read better? Skills developed in particular tasks will not transfer easily to other contexts unless bridges are built for learners and the learners themselves are encouraged not only to 'see' the bridges but to be able to explain them to themselves and others.

In summary, to ensure effectiveness of next steps, it may prove helpful to:

- have pupils explain the task they intend to undertake and its purpose
- encourage pupils to make the link between the task and other aspects of their reading
- highlight similar examples as they occur in reading across the curriculum as part of ordinary classwork.

IN CONCLUSION

Development of more effective reading skills is a lifelong process. There are unlikely to be quick or easy answers but a systematic, sustained approach will support the reading development of all learners.

5 Areas for Exploration

This chapter focuses on the four areas for exploration and offers a framework for progress in the form of questions to be considered. These questions are not intended to be a rigid sequential checklist: they are intended to be used flexibly to help the teacher to identify action and next steps for individual pupils.

The four areas of the reading process have been subdivided as follows:

1 *Attitude and motivation (pages 12 to 13)*

- enjoyment
- concentration
- confidence
- valuing reading

2 *Decoding: recognising words and sequences (pages 14 to 15)*

- word recognition
- reading aloud
- using punctuation
- function of words

3 *Pursuit of meaning (pages 16 to 19)*

- gaining meaning
- devices to aid meaning
- using a range of strategies
- use of dictionaries
- linking to experience
- identifying key points

4 *Awareness of author's use of language (pages 20 to 21)*

- author's stance
- use of language
- genre

This booklet is an attempt to bring together features of existing good practice – much of what it contains should reassure teachers about what they already do rather than reveal anything new or radical.

The aim has been to present a framework within which reading can be taught. It is *not* intended that teachers do everything that is presented within this framework with every pupil and for every piece of reading. The process outlined is an ideal and many factors will affect the way the teachers translate it into practice. However we hope that while teachers will concentrate on particular aspects of the process at any one time, it will prove useful to have in mind the larger structure into which individual aspects fit.

The final chapter (from page 22) illustrates what might be done in specific cases.

Attitude and Motivation

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Enjoyment

Do the pupils approach reading with enthusiasm? Do they expect to enjoy reading?

To build pupils' enthusiasm, you might:

- ask the pupils to identify areas of interest and to offer texts on such areas
- ask the pupils to think of an occasion when they enjoyed reading and then to work together to identify the particular features of the experience which made it enjoyable
- build in opportunities for 'reward' or 'recognition' for having undertaken reading tasks: for example, by praising the pupil individually or in front of the group or class
- share your own enthusiasm for a particular text
- ask the pupil to read a text with a specific purpose in mind, one which boosts pupils' sense of their own importance, eg 'I'm not sure whether or not we should put this text into the school library ... could you read this and tell me what you think?'
- ask pupils to recommend books to one another
- access more demanding texts in which the pupil is interested, eg by drawing on other teachers' class libraries, the school library, the regional/divisional library service
- provide time for reading for enjoyment and ensure an attractive stock of library books.

Concentration

Do the pupils seem to find it difficult to concentrate on the text?

To build concentration on reading you might:

- talk with the pupils to find out if they are enjoying the text
- raise the idea of 'concentration' and discuss with the pupils ways of developing concentration: for example, 'Sometimes I find it difficult to concentrate on reading. What do you do when you want to concentrate on a piece of reading?'
- find out if the level of text is appropriate by, for example, asking the pupils to tell you the 'story so far'
- talk with the pupils to find out if they know why they are being asked to read a particular text
- consider the classroom: for example, is the atmosphere quiet and relaxed and therefore conducive to reading?
- establish a reading 'climate' by discussing and agreeing with pupils the conditions likely to promote a quality reading environment
- identify a comfortable reading area where pupils can go to read
- ensure that there are texts at a range of levels of difficulty and that the texts are attractive
- offer pupils the opportunity to choose an alternative text, having carefully identified the reasons for choosing another text and building in a commitment to read through the new text chosen.

Attitude and Motivation

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS
Confidence *Do the pupils approach reading with confidence?*	*To build confidence in reading you might:* • guide the pupils' choice to texts which are well within their capabilities and which can be read fairly quickly • ask the pupils to list all the things to do with reading which they are 'good' at • offer the pupils a range of short easily accessible texts, so that they can build a record of texts completed; and praise each pupil's work • build in less demanding exposure to a variety of texts by getting older pupils to read aloud to novice readers and letting them frequently read/listen individually with an adult or on tape • help the pupils into a more 'difficult' text on a topic of interest to them by introducing key items of vocabulary in advance.
Valuing reading *Do the pupils see reading as important?*	*To increase the pupils' perception of the value of reading you might:* • ask pupils what reasons they have for developing their reading, sharing with them the aims of particular tasks or encouraging them to identify their own aims • set reading tasks in real life contexts where pupils have to use reading skills to 'make things happen' • show that you as a teacher value 'reading time' by establishing it as part of normal classwork • build links between home and school encouraging parents to work with their children, perhaps using home/school diaries • acknowledge the value of reading tasks by establishing reading groups where pupils can discuss with one another texts they have enjoyed and would recommend to others • discuss with pupils your own enjoyment of reading.

Notes

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Decoding (Recognising Words and Sequences)

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS
Word recognition	
Do the pupils recognise words and relate them to objects, events, people, relationships etc?	*To build up word recognition you might:* • introduce the pupils to words, labels, sentences on display in the classroom • talk with the pupils to find out how they find it easier to learn new words, eg by looking and remembering or by sounding out; then use the agreed strategy to build up new vocabulary • sometimes use a technique of 'look-say-cover-write' to help the pupils to develop awareness of the 'shape' of words which do not lend themselves easily to learning by a letter-sound approach • sometimes reinforce the pupils' word attack by giving focused practice on letter-sound relationships relevant to types of 'new' words • encourage the pupils to build up a word bank, where words are collected under headings or categories, eg 'words from the kitchen' or 'words we use in mathematics' • use word games in which pupils work together, eg building up points for recognising words.
Reading aloud	
Do the pupils read aloud confidently?	*To build skills in reading aloud you might:* • give them time to read the text silently before asking them to read aloud • read aloud with the pupils or to have the pupils work with a more fluent reader to encourage them to pick up the rhythm of reading (paired reading projects involving parents or older pupils working with other pupils are often highly successful). • not correct mistakes as the pupil is reading and thus interrupt the 'flow', but note issues arising as future teaching points.
Using punctuation	
Do the pupils use punctuation when they are reading?	*To increase awareness of the need to use punctuation when reading, you might:* • ask pupils to work in pairs reading alternate sentences • ask pupils to go through a paragraph and to put in a line after every full stop. Then ask them to read the passage aloud, stopping at every line • read aloud with the pupils asking them to keep pace with you. As you pause at full stops the pupils should begin to internalise the rhythm of reading.

Decoding (Recognising Words and Sequences)

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Function of words

Are the pupils aware of the function of words in sentences? For example do they recognise the relationship between things expressed by prepositions? Do they realise when words are operating as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs (even if they are not familiar with these terms)?

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

To increase awareness of the function of words, you might:

- begin from the pupils' own writing and discuss how words convey meaning and how choosing certain words can create pictures, for example
  - naming things, events or people (nouns)
  - showing something happening (verb)
  - describing things, events or people (adjectives)
  - describing how something is happening (adverbs)
- ask the pupils to think about the 'picture' the writer is trying to create and which words help to build the 'picture'
- ask the pupils to draw a character or event using information from the text, then encourage them to think about which words from the story helped to create the drawing.

Notes

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Pursuit of Meaning

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Gaining meaning

Do the pupils expect to gain meaning from reading?

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

To build up awareness of the importance of gaining meaning from reading, you might:

- ask them to carry out a small research task, having first established what they would like to find out
- offer information which the pupils have to read before carrying out a physical task
- provide the pupils with instructions for a task for their group and ask them to read these and then to relay the key instructions to other group members
- provide a small group of pupils with the first part of a story and ask them to try to work out the ending using 'clues' from the first part
- offer the pupils a passage with, for example, every tenth word missing ('cloze') and ask the individual or group to complete the blanks with words which make sense
- help the pupils to 'expect' the words in the text by discussing in advance the objects, events, people, or relationships referred to.

  Pupils might be asked to think about the topic and any words or ideas connected to it, or to tell one another or the teacher the important things they know about it. Video, photographs, exchange of experiences can also be helpful. Sometimes pupils might write about a topic themselves before reading.

Devices to aid meaning

Are the pupils aware of the need to consider headings, sub-headings, pictures, diagrams, etc to help build meaning?

To build awareness of the use of headings, sub-headings, etc, you might:

- offer text, or ask pupils to identify pieces of text for one another (for example a newspaper page), with only headings and photographs and ask pupils to predict what the articles will contain; then ask them to compare their thoughts with the actual articles.

  (This strategy may also be used to highlight inappropriate use of headings, photographs, etc.)
- offer a small group of pupils a piece of text, and ask them to discuss appropriate titles
- ask pupils specifically to note ways in which the writer 'helps' the reader by providing information to guide the reader through the text.

Pursuit of Meaning

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Using a range of strategies

Do the pupils use a range of reading strategies appropriate to the purpose of reading (eg: skimming through to get the gist; scanning for particular ideas or words; reading straight through from beginning to end; using the context to work out the meaning of particular words and sentences)?

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

To build the pupils' range of reading strategies you might:

- discuss with them the different types of reading task and ask a small group to tell each other how they would go about each task
- make explicit the processes of skimming and scanning and build opportunities to develop these into day-to-day reading activities
- ask pupils, working in pairs, to time each other as they scan for particular words; or to find a list of words as quickly as possible
- ask pupils to read quickly through a piece of text to inform others of the key ideas
- 'box', or ask pupils to 'box', sections of text containing ideas related to one another, or ideas which explain or expand on another idea; and discuss how the ideas boxed are connected
- ask pupils to use 'boxing' or underlining to identify parts of the text where ideas may explain or be linked to a word, phrase or sentence they do not understand; to discuss possible meanings, in view of the context; and to check with a dictionary
- use 'cloze' text (with for example every tenth word missing) to encourage discussion of possible words to fill the gaps
- use 'sequencing' activities (text cut up into sections and placed by pupils in appropriate order after discussion) to encourage and make explicit the use of context clues.

Use of dictionaries

Do the pupils know how and when to use a dictionary?

Whenever possible, work using dictionaries should be linked into 'real' reading tasks. While it may be appropriate to offer a limited number of tasks to help pupils become familiar with the mechanics of using a dictionary, dictionary exercises are, on the whole, of limited value. It is also important to remember that a dictionary is useful only when the pupil understands most of the text, but does not know the occasional word.

To develop skills in coping independently with new words, you might:

- discuss with the pupil how to use a dictionary for example to:
  - find words alphabetically by first letter (perhaps at first providing an alphabet)
  - use the second, then third letters of the word
  - note the words at the top of each page, telling you the first and last word
  - consider all the meanings given and compare them with the context of the text, to make sure that the most suitable meaning is selected
  - recognise how the meanings given are structured in the dictionary (for example oldest first, newer later; original then derived meanings; most common meaning followed by less common)
  - distinguish between the various meanings of the same words
  - understand 'signals' in the dictionary entry: for example 'n' = noun, 'v' = verb, 'adj' = adjective etc
- provide a simpler dictionary, if pupils find a complex one confusing
- provide opportunities for pupils to use appropriate dictionaries as part of other reading tasks.

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Pursuit of Meaning

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS
Linking to experience	
Do the pupils link what is being read to their previous experience?	***To build awareness of linking what is read to previous ideas, you might:*** • ask pupils to make explicit their existing ideas about a topic, for example ask a small group to note down ideas before they start reading • ask pupils to identify an area of interest, for example sport, discuss what interests them about it and locate articles related to the topics • use a stimulus such as video, television, photographs and ask pupils to note important points from that. Then provide a piece of text on a similar topic and ask them to discuss ideas which were the same in both and ideas which were different • provide a piece of text and ask pupils to note from the text: – ideas we knew already – new ideas.
Do the pupils bring in their own ideas in a way which interferes with what the writer is saying?	***To highlight awareness of the difference between their own thoughts and ideas and the writer's, you might:*** • make the difference explicit by asking the pupil to think about the text from two different perspectives: – what do you think about ...? – what does the writer/character think about ...?
Do the pupils use what they already know about the topic to make inferences as they read?	***To encourage 'close reading' for inference, you might:*** • engage pupils frequently in 'close reading' and discussion of not only the literal meaning but also the implications of the ideas and events, or choice and organisation of words • use the 'reading purposes' approach to guide pupils in the kind of thinking and discussion which develops ability to explain what is read in terms of what they know already; and to make references using their general knowledge and experience.
Are the ideas in the text unfamiliar to the pupils?	***If the text is evidently presenting pupils with new ideas, you might:*** • provide the chance to understand, experience, discuss the topic and the concepts (visits, explanations, video etc, might be helpful). • provide reading material better matched to pupils' experience.

Pursuit of Meaning

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Identifying key points

Are the pupils able to identify the main points from a text?

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

To develop skills in recognising main ideas, you might:

- discuss with the pupils what they understand by a 'main idea'
- ask the pupils to tell you, or another pupil, what the text is about, perhaps by setting the task in a context such as 'Imagine your friend has been off school and missed the first part of this story. What would you tell them to help them to be able to understand the rest of the story?'
- offer the pupils a piece of text and a number of statements, some of which are main ideas; ask the pupils in pairs to decide which of the statements are main ideas
- ask the pupils in pairs or as a small group to read a series of paragraphs and create a title for each paragraph.

Are the pupils able to follow a line of argument through a piece of reading?

To develop skills in following a line of argument, you might:

- offer pupils an article with a clear line of argument and ask them to state the author's position and locate all the 'evidence' the author puts forward to support this position
- provide pupils with a piece of text and a series of statements, some with which the author would agree and some with which the author would disagree; ask pupils to read the text and then select which statement agrees with the author's position
- engage the pupils in some 'sequencing' work, in which they discuss the appropriate order for segments of a text, with explicit encouragement to focus on, for example, steps towards a conclusion, or advantages – disadvantages – concluding judgement (etc. according to the type of argument in the text).

Notes

Awareness of Author's Use of Language

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS
Author's stance	
Are the pupils able to recognise the author's point of view or standpoint in writing?	*To foster awareness of the author's point of view you might:* • offer pupils examples of texts where the author's point of view is very evident (for example in argument or persuasion) and ask them to identify what the writer is saying • invite pupils to think about an advertisement and to change it to create a different effect, eg to repel the reader • ask pupils to write or talk about the same theme/incident from differing points of view, eg the points of view of different characters in a story.
Use of language	
Are the pupils able to appreciate how the author has used language to create particular effects?	*To encourage awareness of the effects of particular language use you might:* • offer a piece of text where various devices (for example italics, bold, print, underlining) have been used and ask pupils to discuss possible reasons for this and whether or not they think that the use of these devices is helpful • invite pupils to identify advertisements which they like, to discuss the reasons for their choice, and to describe ways in which the person who created the advertisement tries to encourage people to like it and therefore buy the product • ask pupils to choose a piece of text and to account for their reactions by referring to the text – what makes a particular part sad, funny, shocking, tense? • ask pupils to identify a story which they would describe as, eg a ghost story or a love story or a horror story, and to identify the reasons why they would describe the text in this way (perhaps giving headings such as 'choice of words', 'descriptions of characters', 'parts of the story').
Are the pupils able to appreciate how the author has used language to create particular effects?	• ask pupils to experiment with the mood or atmosphere of a text by substituting different words (in a 'cloze'-type passage with adverbs and adjectives omitted, for example) to achieve quite different effects • identify ways in which authors often describe one thing as being like something else, or as being something else, in order to communicate an idea more effectively, for example 'the little dog roared like a lion', or 'his legs turned to jelly' • encourage pupils to identify similes and metaphors in their own language and then to explore the use of devices such as these in their own writing and in texts they are reading • in general, engage pupils frequently in 'close reading', encouraging them to think and talk about all the ideas, feelings or senses that the author's choice and organisation of words bring to their mind.

Awareness of Author's Use of Language

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Genre

Are the pupils aware of the main characteristics of genre?

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

To encourage pupils to be more aware of different genres, you might:

- display different forms and patterns of print – eg poems, stories, scripts, and offer opportunities for pupils to discuss these, identifying features of each
- give options in the tasks offered for pupils' own writing, eg an incident/event written as a letter or as a newspaper article
- offer pupils three pieces of text, two of which relate to one genre and the third to another and ask the pupils to consider the three texts, identify the two which they think have most in common and give reasons for their choice
- offer opportunities for pupils to change a piece of writing from one genre to another – for example, from a story to a script
- ask pupils to identify the possible reasons for a writer having chosen to write using a particular genre
- ask pupils to consider two pieces of text on a similar theme, but written in different genres, eg a story and a poem, and ask them to identify which one they prefer and to give reasons for their decision.

Notes

6 Examples of diagnostic procedures in practice

This chapter contains examples of diagnostic procedures in reading being used in practice. The examples have been drawn from practical piloting of the procedures in primary and secondary schools.

The first five examples illustrate how classwork can be used as information on pupils' learning:

- use of a reading scheme: see 'Colin' and 'Amrik'
- use of non-fiction texts: see 'Kerry' and 'Lisa'
- use of a class novel: see 'John'.

The final example illustrates the use of national tests: see 'Clare'.

Each example contains:

- a pen portrait – brief background information on a pupil including in some cases particular learning aims for that pupil
- the task used
- analysis of the pupil's response, referring to the diagnostic procedures described in the accompanying booklet
- identification of possible 'next steps' to help the pupil to progress.

The analyses and the identification of next steps draw on the areas for exploration described in chapter 5:

- attitudes and motivation
- decoding
- pursuit of meaning
- awareness of author's language use.

The examples present the responses to reading of pupils at different stages of development. The particular stage for each pupil is not given, however, nor the pupil's age. This is because the examples are illustrations of assessment which is useful for the pupil whatever the age or level of reading ability. It is a process of exploring how the pupil has gone about the reading task, and of using the resulting assessment information to help the pupil read more effectively.

There is no one definite way of analysing such information. Teachers will be guided by their knowledge of the pupil's previous progress and ways of learning.

Evidence from Classwork
– Example 1: Colin—Use of a reading scheme

Pen portrait

Colin does not like reading but he does like *Fuzzbuzz* stories. He is now on his eleventh story and worked very hard in class. Recently he has been taking reading home.

THE TASK

His task was to read aloud one of the pages he had worked on at home and then to complete the sentences. The italicised words and other markings on the text show how Colin actually read it aloud. The text was accompanied by a cartoon of Big Don and Little Don in tammies and tartan, showing Big Don bumping Little Don with his elbow.

Reading aloud

Line 1 *Big-Ben-does-not-see-little-things./*

Line 2 *He-trips-up-on them./*

Line 3 *He-trips-up-on-things-in-the-hills./*

Line 4 *He-trips-up-on-things-in-the-glen./*

Line 5 *He-trips -up-on-things-in-his-croft./*

Line 6 *He-does-not-trip-up-on-big-things./*

Line 7 *because-he-can-see-them./*

Line 8 *But-he-does-trip-up-on-little-things./*

Line 9 *In-the-end-he-trips-up-on-little-Don./*

- = short pause / = longer pause

Sentence completion

Words:

1. Big Ben does not see [illegible] things.
2. He [illegible] up on them.
3. He trips up on things in his [illegible].
4. In the end he trips up on Little [illegible].

COLIN'S RESPONSE TO THE TEXT

Colin read with enthusiasm one word at a time and took a big breath at the end of every sentence/line. He began line 7 as if beginning a new sentence. He recognised all the words but consistently read 'tips' instead of 'tnps'. He completed the sentences very quickly, getting two of them correct.

The teacher discussed Colin's approach to the task with him:

Teacher: Can you tell me how to do this?

Colin: Well, you put the words at the top of the page into the spaces.

Teacher: How do you know which ones to put in which spaces?

Colin: It's about the story.

Teacher: How did you decide which word to put in which space?

Colin: It was easy. You read the story and get the answers .... so .. Big Ben does not see Don. He tips up on them. He tips up on things in his croft. And you have to use all the words so the last one is *little*.

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

The teacher identified these as follows:

'I would not concentrate on attitude and motivation with Colin. He enjoys *Fuzzbuzz* and is working hard. To begin with I would concentrate on decoding.

In decoding I think there are two questions to consider. The first is does Colin recognise the word 'trip' and does he know what it means? It was interesting that he made the same mistake when reading and when he completed the sentence. He wrote 'tips' and not 'tnps'. I shall need to talk to him about that. I think that the most important 'next step' for Colin just now is about punctuation when reading. He reads lines as if they were sentences. If you look at his first answer – Don – it's right if you don't notice the word 'things' on the next line. Colin and Peter work well together. We talked about sentences and now they are taking turns to read sentences from their reading book.

One other thing: I will add in more words to choose from in future, so that he can't just put the last word into the last space without reading it! I also think it is important to help Colin be a more fluent reader .... perhaps paired reading might help.'

Notes

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Evidence from Classwork – Example 2: Amrik—Use of a reading scheme

Pen portrait

Amrik is a quiet boy who normally has to be coaxed to contribute to class discussion, but who often takes a book from the class library and especially enjoys stories read to the class by the teacher or heard on tape.

THE TASK

Amrik has read the following passage with the teacher, in his group from the group's current reader (Ginn Reading 360 Programme Level 7 Book 2).

How the bear found his food

There was no noise in the forest.

There was no noise in the forest.

Rabbits hopped about, nibbling the wild grass and flowers.

Chipmunks ran up and down an old oak tree looking for acorns.

A little mouse came creeping ... creeping ...

There was no noise in the forest – only the birds sang.

And then, CRASH – BANG, a bear – a big black bear came into the forest.

The rabbits didn't move.

The chipmunks were still.

The mouse ran under a log.

The birds called an alarm and flew to the tree-tops.

The bear stopped under the oak tree.

He was a hungry bear – a very hungry bear.

He looked up into the tree.

There in the oak tree was his food – a meal of fat acorns. But the acorns were high – high up in the tree.

The hungry bear could not reach them.

He climbed into the tree.

Up, up he climbed. But he did not reach for the acorns.

He crawled out on a big branch of the tree. He sat there and then he rocked the branch. Up and down. Up and down.

And the branch broke with a CRASH – BANG!

Down they fell, branch and acorns and big black bear. CRASH – BANG!

The bear rolled over. He sat up and looked around. With his big paws, he reached for the acorns. He reached for more, and he ate his fill.

And while he ate the acorns, the rabbits and the chipmunks were still. Only the birds called.

When he couldn't eat any more, the bear went out of the forest with a crash and a bang.

And when he was gone, the rabbits hopped about again, nibbling the grass.

Chipmunks ran high up into the tree and down again, and hid acorns in the bushes.

The little mouse came creeping ... creeping ... Again there was no noise in the forest – only the birds sang in the old oak tree.

In the book the story is illustrated, so pupils are helped by seeing pictures of the animals and of the bear climbing along the branch. Before reading the story with the group, the teacher asked them to look out for certain important parts of it:

- how the animals felt and what they were doing at the start
- how they reacted to the bear
- how the bear managed to get at the acorns, and
- how the animals were after the bear had gone.

She invited them to read it all silently, on their own, and then they each read a section of it aloud. After this, the teacher questioned the group, concentrating on the points she had asked them to think about, and also on the use of capital letters, dashes and (...) in the story.

AMRIK'S RESPONSE TO THE TASK

Amrik read the story silently quite slowly, following the text with his finger. His reading aloud was also painstaking, though he did recognise most of the words with little difficulty. Only two which could be 'sounded' with a phonic 'attack' caused him a problem: 'nibbling' and 'alarm'; but he was also stumped by or hesitated about 'wild', 'acorns', 'high' and 'ate'. There was also some hesitancy about 'chipmunks'. In several cases Amrik read across full stops, not reading with appropriate expression.

When he talked about the story, Amrik tended to want to give a lot of information about bears he had seen at the zoo (which the teacher related to the story, explaining that the ones he had seen were white polar bears that lived in icy regions, not black ones that came into forests). However, with some prompting from the teacher, Amrik showed that he understood the sequence: quiet, normal, happy activity–loud noise, and fear when the bear was there–quiet again, and relief on the part of the other animals.

He could find particular information or words which suggested the animals' various activities and their fear, and recognised that they went back at the end to the same activities as before. He was also able to re-tell what the bear did to get the acorns, but did not realise that the shaking of the branch was intended by the bear to knock them down. He enjoyed the idea of the bear falling with a crash. Amrik recognised that the use of capital letters for 'CRASH' and 'BANG' was meant to convey loudness, but he was not able to read aloud with the kind of expression which could indicate how the dashes were used (eg in 'He was a hungry bear – a very hungry bear.').

Evidence from Classwork
– Example 2: Amrik—Use of a reading scheme

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION

Which of the four areas for exploration (attitude and motivation, pursuit of meaning, decoding-recognising words and sentences, awareness of author's use of language) are particularly relevant for Amrik, and which particular questions should be considered?

Some points noted in the description above of Amrik's reading were already known to the teacher and had previously been recorded in his English Language record of strengths and needs. These were:

- his tendency to relate what he reads to experiences he has had (like that of the bears in the zoo)
- his slowness to recognise 'irregularly' spelt words which do not offer 'phonic clues' to pronunciation, and therefore to recognition of the word
- his 'word by word' reading aloud, which sometimes causes him to miss the beginnings and ends of sentences and read with poor expression of the meaning.

Amrik's reading of this section of his reader suggests need for continued attention to decoding-recognising words and sentences, and in particular to the recognition of unfamiliar words, to reading aloud confidently and to punctuation in reading.

Analysis of his understanding of the story, however, also shows that, probably, his sophistication as a reader is to some extent hidden by the problems apparent when he reads aloud. In fact he showed an appreciation of the overall structure of the story and of how the author had conveyed both the other animals' fear and the bear's noises and awesome appearance. The 'pursuit of meaning' aspect of his reading is therefore a strength, for which praise and encouragement could be given.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

This stage of progress suggests that useful next steps for Amrik could be:

1 Help with unfamiliar and awkwardly spelt words prior to reading

This might take the form of discussion of meanings and demonstration of spelling, with 'look/cover/write' practice. Such an approach has the advantage of both focus on the meaning and structure of the word and, in the subsequent reading of the text, immediate reinforcement through the recognition and interpretation of the words in an interesting context.

2 Work to increase confidence in reading aloud with good expression of the meaning

One way to approach this might be to begin with silent reading and fairly detailed discussion, to ensure full understanding; then to invite Amrik to read a section aloud, specifically asking him to read whole sentences at a time, to make it sound exciting, funny (or whatever is appropriate).

Demonstration by the teacher, or other pupils (on different sentences/sections from Amrik's) could be helpful. So could activities in which another pupil or pupils, or parent(s)/brother/sister, read(s) aloud through a story with Amrik, each taking a sentence at a time. Needless to say, praise for Amrik's progress with this skill would be an important factor in helping him.

Both of these 'next steps' could be repeated in various reading activities over a period of time.

Notes

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Evidence from Classwork
– Example 3: Kerry—Use of non-fiction texts

Pen portrait

Kerry's confidence as a reader is developing fast, after a period of slow progress. The shift in motivation seems to be related to a change in the reading scheme she was following to one she finds easier to cope with.

THE TASK

In connection with an environmental studies topic, the class has been learning how to find information in reference books using the index and how to summarise the important points. The approach to summarising used involves three stages:

1 underlining key words on the text after reading it
2 noting these on a separate page
3 writing an account of the information obtained.

In the case of Kerry's group the teacher asked the pupils to underline words on the first two paragraphs only (other groups did this for the whole text) and the teacher gave the group direct support and encouragement as they 'made the notes' transferring the underlined words to the separate page.

Surviving in the Desert
Houses made of hair

To make tents, [illegible] is collected by combing the animals. It is then [illegible] into long strips which are sewn together. In the [illegible] wool is used. When wet, it expands and so keeps rain out. The largest piece is used for the tent roof. The side walls and the back can be rolled up to allow cool breezes to blow through it.

The tent is [illegible] to prevent winds and sandstorms from blowing it over. Although it is possible to stand up inside, people tend to [illegible] to avoid smoke from the fire. A wealthy sheikh may have a tent with four or five central [illegible] instead of the [illegible] which are used to support smaller tents. The poles can be raised or lowered depending on the strength of the wind. Smaller poles are used to support the front, the back and the sides.

A curtain inside the tent divides the space into the male and female areas. The male section is the more public area. It has a fire around which people can sit and where coffee is made. Camel saddles and cushions are used as seating. The female area is used for storing spare clothes, sacks of grain, dates, coffee beans, and leather bags containing water and cooking utensils. There may also be a paraffin lamp, a radio and perhaps a sewing-machine.

Whether tent strips are bought or made, repairs need to be carried out and the whole tent may have to be taken apart each year to allow damaged strips to be replaced. There may be only a few tents in a camp or as many as thirty. These family groups move off together every week or two, when they need to find fresh grazing areas. The tent and everything inside it can be dismantled and packed in less than two hours.

The text had two pictures, one of Bedouin women weaving tent strips and one of them sewing the strips together in the open air to make a tent.

KERRY'S ACCOUNT OF THE INFORMATION

The words underlined in the text are those Kerry chose. She then listed them on her notes page:

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

Evidence from Classwork
– Example 3: Kerry—Use of non-fiction texts

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION

For Kerry, the most fruitful area for exploration in connection with this task is probably pursuit of meaning, particularly questions concerned with using context fully, main ideas or following a (brief) line of argument. There might also be something to consider in the area of recognising sentences, as opposed to just points of information.

Kerry underlined and then listed words related to the five key points of information given on the first page:

1. woven camel or goat hair
2. sheep's wool used in the Sahara
3. back and sides of tent can be rolled up
4. tents are low (so people sit)
5. number of poles supporting tent.

In addition, in her written account of the information, Kerry refers to two further points from the second page of the text (the Bedouin travel about and the men and women are separated in the tent). She was probably helped to recall these two points by the preparatory class discussion of the text. Even so, it is clear that she has been able to recognise important vocabulary and understand several key ideas in the text. Her written account also shows some appreciation of at least two supporting points of detail – the reason for having 'low-lying' tents. (There is also some indication, though not very explicit, in 'woven into little bit of thread' that she had an idea of the long strips into which the animal hair is woven.)

Kerry's written account also raises some points which the teacher would want to explore with her. For example, she has become confused about the role of sheep's wool in the life of the Bedouin, possibly because class discussion about how they sleep (which is not referred to in the text) has misled her. She has also misread the specific point about people normally remaining seated in the tent, possibly because the 'Although' construction which starts the sentence was unfamiliar. Also, in choosing to underline and use in her account the idea of 'two or three' poles for the tent, she has missed the main point of that sentence, that the rich leader of the group would have a bigger tent.

Kerry's account also raises possible points for exploration in respect of her writing, of course, if the teacher wishes to discuss them with her, or perhaps take them into account the next time they are working on writing.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

A 'growth point' for Kerry is her ability to find key points as she works sequentially through the text and to recall key points from class discussion of it. Her confidence would be boosted by praise for this and she could be assured that she can become even better at noting and writing down the important information (perhaps to give to another group).

Her main need to achieve this improvement seems to be to read each information point and each sentence carefully, relating them to their immediate context. The teacher might want to take time to work with Kerry's group on this text and similar ones, helping them to look *consciously* at what comes just before and just after a point like 'In the Sahara, sheep's wool is used', to see what the *whole message* is about that point.

It might also be helpful for the teacher to 'box' sections of text dealing with ideas which are linked or affect one another and to ask the pupils to explain the message of each 'box'. Once they are used to this approach, the pupils could be invited to discuss and decide for themselves where the 'boxes' should be drawn; and then to decide what the 'message' of each box is.

Notes

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Evidence from Classwork
– Example 4: Lisa—Use of non-fiction texts

Pen portrait

Lisa enjoys English and has worked hard on the *Witch Poems and Stories* unit. She reads a great deal of fiction but until now, when asked to undertake any research work, has copied out sections of text.

THE TASK

The task was to undertake a piece of research and to present findings in the form of a written report.

The focus of the research could be either

topic (a) witchcraft – what is it?

or

topic (b) witches from the past.

LISA'S RESPONSE TO THE TASK

Witches

Witches are people who are supposed to worship a non Christian god and to be able to cast magic spells for good or evil. They are said to fly at night on a wooden broom. There are lots of different tales about witches in lots of different films and stories all the witches look the same, ugly face very old and always a black cloke. Lots of people believe that you became a witch by working with the devil. It is said that the witches are given there powers by the devil lots of books where written about witches and all their evil powers and ect. The people of the church thought that witches were [illegible] and killing [illegible] witches. I do not believe in witchcraft.

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

The teacher's reaction to Lisa's report was as follows:

'Lisa has done some background reading for this report and has tried to use her own words rather than simply copying out chunks of text. She has presented a number of points of information, some of which are taken from reading eg 'witches are people who are supposed to worship a non-Christian God' and 'between 1500 and 1750, 200,000 men and women were killed because people thought that they were witches'. However I suspect that some ideas came from her own experience: 'all witches look the same, ugly face very old and always a black cloke'. Her report is not really very well focused either on topic (a) or topic (b) but includes elements of both.

There is a sense of life about the response and interest in the subject which I would wish to maintain.

I talked about her work and agreed to concentrate on pursuit of meaning. We decided to begin by separating out Lisa's ideas from library research. (Do pupils bring in their own ideas?) and to make the difference clear in the report. We also talked about different reading strategies (Do pupils use a range of strategies appropriate to the purpose of reading?). It became clear that Lisa always simply reads through text from beginning to end. Lisa is now going to work on building skimming and scanning into her range of approaches to reading. She is working on this with one of her friends, reading pieces of text quickly and telling one another about the main ideas.'

Notes

Evidence from Classwork
– Example 5: John—Use of a class novel

Pen portrait

John finds some reading difficult. Recent English work in his class has been based on *A Pair of Jesus Boots* by Sylvia Sherry. The novel is more difficult than would be attempted by John in his own private choice of reading.

THE TASK

Over a period of time, sections of the novel were read aloud to a group by the teacher while John and a few others followed the line in their own copies of the text. Now and again the teacher stopped to ask questions and invite discussion from the group. John participated well throughout.

The purpose of the work was to develop the ability to follow certain threads or themes through a lengthy text. Thus, although particular episodes and passages received close attention, all discussion and writing related to the main theme – the development of the central character, Rocky O'Rourke.

John's task was to write about Rocky O'Rourke and to show how Rocky changed as the story developed.

JOHN'S RESPONSE TO THE TASK

A pair of Jesus boots and the author is Sylvia Sherry.

Rocky had a wee step sister and a big brother who was in jail for the first few chapters. Rocky wanted to be a criminal he lived in St. Gallons Sore. He is the leader of the cats. The cats were Chan, Bedeey, Nabber and Billy. They were boys that hung about shops and broke into shops. The cats did not like the chikes lot the cats like to fight with the chikes lot but chikes joey was set up and went to jail and he was Rocky's hero and look after it out very and when he got home he stole his mums money and went away and he wanted out of Liverpool because he was afraid of the police.

Rocky's dad died and his mum got married with the other man who had a wee cart. Mr Oliver was the man that looked after the flats and Rocky was playing football and he found out that he was an ex Liverpool player.

He chaneged when Joye got out of jail he did not like him for takeing the money from his mum so he did not want to be a criminal.

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

The teacher's reaction to John's work was as follows:

'John has enjoyed 'Jesus Boots' and sometimes when we were reading the book talked to me about what he thought would happen next. His piece of writing shows that he has picked up a lot of information from the novel. He knew the cats were Chan, Beady, Nabber and Billy and he has been able to make inferences about characters: 'Rocky wanted to be a criminal'.

He does show an awareness of the change in Rocky: 'Joey was set up and went to jail and he was Rocky's hero' and 'he (Rocky) did not like him for taking the money from his mum so he did not want to be a criminal'. There is an attempt to explain the change in Rocky by referring to his disillusion with his brother, Joey, when he witnesses Joey stealing from his mother.

There is evidence that John knows of other conflicting influences on Rocky (paragraph 2), but these are not linked explicitly to the change in Rocky. I would want to look at pursuit of meaning – at the questions on main points and following a line of argument. Perhaps it would help to give John's group some statements about Rocky and ask them to identify which of these were main ideas; or it might be useful to give the group a range of statements, some true, some not and ask John's group to choose which ones are true and to prove it from the text.'

Notes

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Evidence from Classwork
– Example 6: Clare—Use of national tests

Pen portrait

Clare is a lively, talkative and sociable girl, interested in everything and an avid reader for pleasure. Her teacher had considered that she was clearly attaining 5-14 Level B targets in her reading in class.

THE TASK

After a brief preliminary discussion with the teacher and her group Clare read 'The Ginger Coloured Dragon' (National Test RNOB32) and gave answers to the test questions as shown below.

The Ginger Coloured Dragon

Far, far away in a northern country there is a dark and gloomy place called the Valley of the Dragons. Tall grey mountains stand around it and a deep cold loch comes into it from the sea.

Once upon a time a dragon called Gustus lived in this place. Gustus was a very special sort of dragon. His skin was not green like the skin of the other dragons. Instead it was the colour of ginger.

When Gustus was born his parents said, 'Oh dear! Something has gone wrong! His skin is such a funny colour.'

It was really a beautiful colour, warm and gentle. But all the other dragons thought it was ugly, just because it was different.

The dragons liked to tell stones to one another. When it was time for a story, they came out of the caves where they lived and sat in a ring with the story-teller in the middle.

Gustus loved stories and wanted to have a chance to tell some, but the others laughed at him and would not listen when he tried to go into the centre of the circle to take his turn.

'Ha, ha, Gustus!' they cried. 'You're an ugly fellow, you know. Don't you wish you were green and beautiful like us?'

When this happened, Gustus could not go on with the story that he wanted to tell. Instead, he crept away to his cave and lay there all alone feeling sad.

Adapted from *The Ginger Coloured Dragon* by Margaret Donaldson

Note: Clare read the passage and answered the questions on her own, 'as a test'. Afterwards, however, the teacher could, of course, go over it with her, or perhaps with her group, discussing what she meant by her answers and trying to find out how apparent errors had arisen.

CLARE'S RESPONSES IN THE TEST

Sentence completion

SECTION A: Use the story to help you complete the sentences.

1 Gustus was different from the other dragons because
his skin was beautiful

2 When Gustus was born his parents thought
his skin was beautiful

3 When the other dragons saw Gustus they thought his colour was
horrible

4 We like to watch television in our spare time. The dragons like to
tell stones to each outher

5 When it was his turn to tell a story a dragon sat
in his cave feeling sad

6 When Gustus tried to take his turn to tell a story the other dragons
sat laughing

7 Gustus could not go on with his story because
he was feeling very sad

SECTION B: Underline the best ending.

1 At the end of the story Gustus feels
unhappy
terrified
cross

2 The other dragons treated Gustus the way they did because he was
beautiful
different
alone

3 The other dragons treated Gustus
well
badly
kindly

4 Gustus
disliked stories
liked stories very much
sometimes liked stories

SECTION C: Which of the people in the story might have said these things? Underline the best answer.

1 'What a strange colour my little one is!'
Gustus / a dragon / Gustus' mother

2 'Go away! You are not like the rest of us!'
Gustus / dragons / Gustus' parent's

3 'All I wanted to do was tell a story.'
Gustus / another dragon / Gustus' father

4 'Green is best! Down with Ginger!'
Gustus / dragons / Gustus' parents

5 'It would be lovely to be like the others'.
Gustus / dragons / Gustus' parents

Evidence from Classwork
– Example 6: Clare—Use of national tests

Clare scored a total of 10 marks out of 16:

- 3/7 for Section A, the sentence completion task, where the focus is on understanding of the facts and events in the story (they also touch on the attitudes of the characters).
- 3/4 for the 'best ending' tasks in Section B. These focus on understanding of the feelings and attitudes of the characters.
- 4/5 for Section C, the underlining tasks, which also focus on feelings and attitudes of characters but involve recognising these in sentences different from those actually in the story.

AREAS FOR EXPLORATION AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

With a pupil's responses to a national test, the most likely major areas for exploration will be pursuit of meaning and awareness of author's use of language. Which particular questions arise for consideration?

Despite the low score in Section A, it is clear that Clare has understood the main point of the story – Gustus is ostracised because he looks different. She has inferred the feelings and attitudes of the various characters – this can be deduced from Questions C1, 4 and 5 (and from the wrong answer to C2). She has also shown in Question B1, 3 and 4 that she can relate these feelings and attitudes to her own experience by being able to select appropriate words to describe them. We can also deduce from questions A3 and 6 that Clare has a good understanding of the other dragons' attitude to Gustus and some linguistic sophistication (she supplies a synonym for 'ugly', not just picking the word out of the passage, and she (probably) recognises the tone in which the dragons said 'Ha, Ha'. This last point could be checked by the teacher in discussion.)

What about her errors? How is it that a pupil who has evidently understood the core of this text 'missed' four of seven apparently straightforward questions in Section A? And what can be learned from her answers to B2 and C2? The answers to B2 and C2 might prove interesting, if discussed with Clare. Her choice of 'He was alone' as the reason why the other dragons were unpleasant to Gustus might show that she was making a quite sophisticated inference, based on the realisation that one reason why a group treats certain individuals badly is precisely because they do not have supporting friends. Similarly, her answer to C2 might suggest an awareness that even parents can reject someone who is 'different'. If discussion showed that this was how Clare was thinking, good 'next steps' might be to praise her for these ideas, but also to suggest that there is another reason why the dragons treated Gustus badly which she can work out from the passage, and to ask her to consider whether the story, as we see it in the passage, tells us that Gustus' parents or others were more likely to reject him. (Clare might be asked to find out from the passage all we get to know about Gustus' parents: in fact this is only that they thought something had gone wrong with the colour of his skin.)

It could be, of course, that Clare's wrong answers, in particular to B2 and to A1, 2 and 5, did not derive from 'over-interpretation' of the story but, more simply, from inadequate 'technique' for dealing with this type of test. For example, her answers to A1, 2 and 7 might be the result of writing prematurely, before reading again and checking the whole of the relevant section for the information. Thus she doesn't say why Gustus is special (A1) or what the effect is on his feelings of the other dragons' noisy behaviour (A5). In A2 she has picked up an accurate word for Gustus' skin and may have assumed that his parents would naturally think it beautiful, omitting the point that they were, at least at first, surprised or concerned about it. In B2 she may simply have found in the passage the correct fact that Gustus ends up alone, missing the more obvious point that it was the fact that he was different that caused his problems. Suitable next steps might be to encourage her in all close reading tasks, whether written or oral, to look for all the relevant information and be fully explicit in explaining it.

Notes

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